

An Unnecessary Burden

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By JOE WILSON

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With gas prices slowly rising, it would seem absurd for Congress to be charging forward with a massive new energy tax. Nevertheless, under an ineffective and high-tax proposal called cap and trade, Democrats are poised to increase the burden on American families and small business. Their cap-and-tax program will raise the price at the pump while increasing your home utility bills and the price of any product that required energy to produce.

What is particularly astonishing about the zeal of some in Congress to cram through this massive new tax is that they all but ignore two important facts: Their legislation will have little if any effect on carbon emissions worldwide, and there is a stronger, comprehensive approach to a cleaner energy future that will not tax Americans.

The American Conservation and Clean Energy Independence Act was recently introduced by a bipartisan group in Congress. It would allow for the production of U.S. oil and natural gas, use revenues generated from exploration to invest in alternative energy sources and promote conservation. Most importantly, it would not raise taxes on American families. I am proud to be a part of this effort, because it is an approach to a new energy infrastructure that Americans continue to overwhelmingly support: an all-of-the-above strategy. This is an American-first approach instead of a government-first approach.

One of the more positive aspects of our strategy is that it can actually achieve a cleaner environment, while cap and trade would fall remarkably short. Mandates and taxes imposed on American families and businesses will do nothing to curb the habits of the rest of the world. That is a go-it-alone strategy that will make America less competitive in the global economy.

A policy that is holistic in its approach will put the United States in a position to one day give the world the tools necessary for all nations to have cleaner energy. This would be a real victory for our global environmental health and the general prosperity of American industry.

To achieve all this, we must be honest and deliberate in our efforts. In the near term, the pace of innovation into new transportation fuels will not eliminate the need for oil and natural gas, so we must expand exploration of U.S. sources. And while there is an urgency to diminish our reliance on oil, there must be an equal if not greater urgency to reduce our dependency on foreign oil. It is in our national security interest to not be beholden to foreign oil supplies.

Additionally, new transportation alternatives such as battery-powered vehicles will require an electricity grid that can be sustained by affordable energy production. Unlike solar and wind power that have been marginally successful in providing substantial energy generation, nuclear power has proven to be a safe and clean alternative. In South Carolina, nuclear power has accounted for nearly 50 percent of all electricity generation for decades. Our bill encourages the production of nuclear power plants and the reprocessing, recycling or safe storage of spent nuclear material.

Beyond the pursuit for U.S. oil and natural gas and the development of alternative energy, there is an equally important component of a comprehensive energy strategy: conservation. Conservation should not mean the government rations energy use or imposes mandates that seek to punish consumers into being more efficient. Positive encouragement — tax credits for using more efficient products and incentives to maximize the efficiency in commercial and residential construction — will do far more to enlist the American people in our common pursuit of cleaner, more reliable and more affordable energy.

The final byproduct of all this innovation, expanded energy production and conservation efforts is, quite plainly, job creation. A national energy tax would cost jobs as companies find it harder to compete globally. It would be ineffective in addressing global environmental concerns, and it would raise fuel and utility costs for American families. The American Conservation and Clean Energy Independence Act will create new American jobs. It will stimulate job growth in the immediate oil, natural gas and new energy development industries. And it will motivate the expansion of industries that are adversely affected by unpredictable and unstable energy costs. Lastly, it will create for the world the tools for a cleaner energy future.

Mr. Wilson, a Springdale Republican, represents South Carolina's 2nd congressional district.